

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today Congressman John Olver delivered the following remarks on the House floor:

"I rise tonight to remember and honor the life and the life's work of a dear friend, Senator Ted Kennedy.

There are few Americans alive today whose lives are not affected in some way by Senator Kennedy's vast body of legislative achievements. He is credited with hundreds of laws enacted over his incredible forty-seven-year Senate career, with many of those laws making up fundamental tenets of the social contract that is our modern society. Above all else, Senator Kennedy's legacy is one of humanitarianism and caring – caring for those without sound body, caring for those without means, caring for those without power, caring for those who would not have had a voice at the highest levels of government if it had not been for the booming and irrepressible voice of Ted Kennedy.

One of the best examples of Senator Kennedy's impact on society can be seen in his groundbreaking Americans with Disabilities Act. In his own family life, Kennedy had seen the disadvantages and discrimination that persons with disabilities can face. He was determined to enact protections for disabled Americans similar to those afforded by the Civil Rights Act. The ADA opened the door to jobs, housing, transportation, communications and a better life for millions of citizens. It also fundamentally changed the way people viewed others who live with disabilities, paved the way for similar laws in at least seventy other countries, and led to the adoption of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Providing opportunity was a great theme of Senator's Kennedy's work, as evidenced by his weighty contributions to preserving and strengthening public education. In the face constant efforts to diminish or even eliminate the obligatory role of state governments and the assisting role of the federal government to provide every child of every family with a quality primary and secondary education, Senator Kennedy never rested from his efforts to support and augment the sacred public commitment. He fought for better teachers, better schools, more funding and better methods to enhance learning and ensure the development of all children into the best citizens they could be.

For hourly wage-earning Americans, Ted Kennedy will perhaps be best remembered for his steadfast refusal to accept minimum wage levels as they fell further and further behind in their purchasing power, even when the legislative path to fix the problem appeared blocked. When others balked, faltered or dug into hardened positions, Senator Kennedy had a knack for pushing through a deal to get everything he could for workers as soon as it could possibly be achieved. His tenacity to help those in our workforce who needed it the most was unparalleled.

On the international front, after regretting voting for the Gulf of Tonkin resolution in his second year in office, when the great debate over America's waging of preemptive war arose at the outset of this decade, Senator Kennedy used his stature and status as a national newsmaker to oppose the President and the Congress' transgressions as he saw them with the use of America's great military power. Above all, Senator Kennedy fought for peace; for life and limb of

American soldiers and others in the world who depend on America to make wise decisions with our foreign and defense policies.

Prominent and lasting legislative achievements to uphold and honor civil rights, ensure voting rights, promote public service, reform immigration, gain equal treatment for women, and improve the lot of war veterans and their families are also highlights of the remarkable Kennedy record. In particular, health care, the issue Senator Kennedy himself labeled as the cause of his life, stands out as perhaps his greatest area of achievement.

Kennedy's push to expand care to people and situations where it was lacking or absent yielded, most notably, extended COBRA coverage for workers in between jobs and the elimination of pre-existing condition restrictions for workers in group insurance plans offered through their employer. These two laws alone went a long way to close the unjust gaps in coverage that had plagued many working families.

The health coverage of all children was especially important to Senator Kennedy. He refused to accept that it couldn't be done. His negotiations, maneuvering and personal advocacy within the Senate, especially those involving his eventual close friend Senator Orrin Hatch, are both legendary and represent some of the most productive funding results in the history of public health care in America. The SCHIP battles waged and successes won by Ted Kennedy were a testament to his personal view that the issue of keeping children healthy was a moral one.

That level of commitment carried over to Senator Kennedy's crucial legislative work to create the Family and Medical Leave Act and the Ryan White CARE Act for Americans living with HIV and AIDS, and it was equally evident in his efforts to close all gaps in medical coverage to all Americans.

That ultimate cause of universal health care is one that Senator Kennedy did not live to see enacted, but we are where we are today because of Kennedy's life-long commitment to the cause. House and the Senate leaders are doing all they can to move plans to provide everyone with health coverage because of the groundwork that Senator Kennedy laid with his long career. Barack Obama became the politician and president that he is, committed to health care for all, because of Senator Kennedy's work. The effort is still his effort. The gains that Congress will eventually pass are a part of his legacy.

Closer to home, back in my part of Massachusetts, Senator Kennedy was always a good friend to the First Congressional District. In recent years, he championed the development UMass' Pioneer Valley Life Sciences Institute and its Integrated Sciences Building. He helped support Holyoke Hospital, a critical provider in a region that is struggling to maintain its level of health care services. He also helped greatly with the important initiative to bring broadband to the length of the Pioneer Valley.

Senator Kennedy was ever willing to exercise his seniority in the Senate when Massachusetts companies needed it, and when campaign season came around, no one could bring out and motivate as many activists and workers as Senator Kennedy. He is rightly famous for his high oratory to the entire nation on the core principles of liberalism and democracy, but his stump

speeches in the small towns and remote corners of Massachusetts for state or local race candidates were no less moving to those who were lucky enough to hear them.

To me personally, Senator Kennedy was an inspiring and thoughtful friend. I could always count on an immediate and passionate response to whatever was on my mind, and his attentive friendship came with a warm smile, a sense of humor and a caring heart. I will miss him dearly.

Senator Kennedy is unmatched in the Congress, and it may be a very long time, if ever, before we have another legislator with his breadth and depth of national leadership. He was a tireless worker for his constituents and all humanity, and I am honored to have known and served with him.”